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# Alberta Politics in Flux: Discontent with Government and the Effect on Political Parties in Alberta 1981-82

by

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As a person with no formal training in the analysis of politics and government, I was especially intrigued by a quote I heard during my year as an intern: "Oppositions do not win elections, governments lose them." If one believes this description of politics, then widespread discontent with government could represent a tenuous and volatile period for p es in power. During this past year, I have noticed an ever-increasing unrest and anger with federal politicians. However, events in provincial politics indicated that political reaction does not respect federal-provincial distinctions. In the fall of 1981, Sterling Lyon's government was defeated in Manitoba, and this became the first sign of an anti-government mood in the West that resulted as well in the unlikely defeat of Allan Blakeney's N.D.P. in Saskatchewan and in the Alberta by-election message sent to Peter Lougheed.

The significance of this general discontent becomes apparent when one notes the concurrent activity in Alberta's political parties, both governing and opposition. The deep undercurrents of dissatisfaction led to a state of flux in politics in Alberta which has resulted in a changed political scene. While this paper cannot attempt to present a simple set of cause-effect explanations for the present scene in Alberta politics, a paper of this scope can attempt to point to the ways in which parties represented in the Alberta Legislature seemed to be affected by the surge of an anti-government mood.

To this end, this paper will first explore the nature of the discontent with government and present indications of the changing attitude towards and support for Alberta's present government. The flux in Alberta's politics will then be discussed through a brief presentation of the attempts and abilities of "new" and "old" opposition parties to present themselves as an alternative to the present government in this time of general unrest. Once these have been discussed, the paper will focus on an observational study of the Progressive Conservative Party's annual convention and initiatives taken by the government in the Legislature during the past year to determine the ways in which this party in power is at present dealing with the challenge of such discontent and flux. While newspapers and magazines have been used in many cases as sources of information, this paper is primarily a collection of my personal observations on the parties represented in the Legislature.

An initial understanding of economic conditions and a presentation of the public's vision of government is necessary before the implications of the contemporary mood of discontent with government can be discussed. It has been suggested by some that the present "let's get the government" mood has been brought about by the recession and high interest rates,[1] by the economic conditions affecting all Canadians. It will be useful therefore to examine the nature of the relationship between economic conditions and general discontent with government and to establish whether this discontent can be seen to have influenced

the direction of party activity in the province.

There has been a considerable amount of bleak news on the economy in Canada during the past year, and expressions such as "gloom", "crippled economy", and "deepest and most pervasive recession of the post-war era"[2] are not unfamiliar to Albertans. Daily headlines tell of bankruptcies, high interest rates, inflation, the devaluating Canadian dollar, Canadians losing their homes and jobs, and business and industry cutbacks and shut-downs. Alongside these stories, news editors and economists continue to point to policies that have proved detrimental to private sector investment and have helped precipitate poor economic conditions, policies such as the federal budget, the National Energy Program, and the Foreign Investment Review Agency.

Canadians are being affected by economic conditions that they do not completely understand and politicians and bureaucrats seem to be failing to calm the inevitable uncertainty. The public was being told: "lower your expectations", "tighten your belts", and "learn to live with it."[3] A "crisis in confidence" emerged, and many came to believe the statement that "economic policy-makers are not dealing from a position of strength."[4] The ability of our leaders to govern came into question though some saw the present situation as inevitable after a decade or more of expanding government involvement in the economy and poor domestic policies.[5]

The beginnings of this unrest were evident in the fall of 1981 but the dissatisfaction was propelled considerably in the spring of 1982 as the economic outlook failed to get brighter. The federal government seemed to be digging their heels in deeper and provincial politicians failed to effectively pressure Ottawa to take action after the First Minister's Conference on the Economy in early February. The solutions to economic ills seem completely beyond the grasp of the average citizen and in Western Canada the uncertainty was perhaps more intense, given the vision of a federal Liberal government that is not attuned to the needs and concerns of Western Canada.[6] In light of this vision, and given that the Liberals are not represented west of Manitoba, the outlet for all the uncertainty felt by Western Canadians was vague and undefined, and many tended to lash out at available targets. As one columnist said:

> There's no shortage of advice on how to heal our crippled economy. And there's no lack of baddies to lay the blame on, either. Hang it on the feds, the Yanks, O.P.E.C., interest rates, inflation, even Peter Lougheed. You may as well, everyone else is![7]

In Alberta, a new group has presented an outlet for the discontent. Right-wing separatist extremists have captured attention in the West recently with their platforms designed to "send a message to Ottawa and Edmonton". The significant number of Albertans that attend the rallies of such groups indicates that the concerns of the public are very real. Despite the fact that discontent was originally aimed at federal politicians as visible targets, politicians in the provinces

were not left unaffected. Many middle-class Canadians began to think of their own interests and how to protect them.[8] The economic recession affected Canadians to such an extent that the promise of some degree of relief or security was attractive. The appeal of low-interest loans for mortgages was more important to Saskatchewan voters that issues such as the patriation of the Constitution. In the Alberta by-election, The Western Canada Concept Party spoke not only of separatism but also of low interest loans to farmers and small business, competitive markets, and less government involvement In the aftermath of these elections it becomes apparent that what was vague, economically-based uncertainty and anti-federal feeling could be translated into provincial electoral protest. The Saskatchewan and Manitoba elections reveal something of the volatility of such uncertainty, and in Alberta it became clear that the message was for Lougheed as well as for Trudeau.

Despite Alberta's low tax rates, despite the absence of sales or gasoline tax, regardless of Alberta's low home heating bills and comparatively low unemployment figures, more press is being given to the slumps in the oil and gas industry, the hurting forest industry, bankrupt businesses, crushing mortgage rates, downturns in consumer spending and people losing their jobs. Albertans have been protected from the ups and downs in the economy of the last decade by their petro-dollars, a situation which leads Peter Lougheed to comment that, "People have been doing really well and then when it turns down, the

psychological effect is greater than it is in say Ontario, where it's been going on a long time."[9] The political implications of this "psychological effect" are to be found in observations such as the following: "In Alberta, Peter Lougheed has long claimed credit for the good times. Now he is blamed whenever a job is lost or another project is scrapped."[10]

The degree to which the mood has changed in Alberta first came to my attention when an opposition M.L.A. commented to me this past spring that people "out there" were talking out against Premier Lougheed. While this member would never have attacked the Premier openly in Question Period in the previous sittings, he talked as if the rules of the game had changed, implying that one could now score political points by such action. Perhaps the most telling indicator of the discontent with the Alberta government is Lougheed's own recognition of it. He was quoted as saying that under current economic circumstances, all governments are targets of public discontent, and that in Alberta the uncertainty is especially acute because the province has enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and the sudden downturn has led to voter uncertainty.[11] Further, Lougheed seems to have recognized the volatile nature of this discontent. In an interview with Allan Fotheringham he stated that:

> (In Alberta) most people are apolitical, in the sense they don't have any strong commitment.... (We) don't have the political party ties. We haven't had the polarization like Saskatchewan B.C....So we have much more of a floating vote.[12]

It is significant that politicians are recognizing the actual and potential impact of the economic slump on the public. The potential impact of discontent for Alberta can be measured if one examines an article which appeared in the Financial Post in October. Its present obsolescence points to the degree to which the public's attitude has changed, as the assumptions upon which the article is based no longer hold true in all cases.

In Giles Gherson's article "For Alberta it's the same old Tories", Larry Pratt of the University of Alberta is quoted as saying: "Like Manning...Lougheed has been able to create an aura of invincibility about his Tory machine. I could see him wiping out the opposition in the next election."[13] Referring to Lougheed's success at exploiting energy pricing and control and his "tried-and-true (formulas) of arousing the populace against some external threat posed by the federal government", Gherson was predicting that the next election would be waged in much the same way with Lougheed capitalizing on his success with the energy pricing agreement while maintaining he had held firm against the federal government on the Constitution and equalization payment cutbacks. The complacency towards the Lougheed administration in October is capsulized in the observation that "cabinet ministers can afford to give opposition M.L.A.s hardly a thought as they manage the province." Such a situation was attributed to the "beguilingly pragmatic policies that leave the opposition with few routes of attack."

For Gherson, threats to the Lougheed government and to the Progressive Conservative Party would come from within the party and government, not from external forces such as the opposition. He lists the four potential threats as: questions over where Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund money should go, the hints of scandal in such incidents as the speculative land purchases and developer lobbying by former cabinet ministers as it related to Edmonton land annexation, the growing reputation for secrecy and aloofness, and rumours of Lougheed's retirement. The solid standing of the party in the eyes of the public was attributed to the "formidable skill at political organization" on the part of Lougheed and his party. He refers to the way in which Lougheed's Conservatives follow the traditions of the U.F.A. and Social Credit parties, fighting for the province's interests and promoting its concerns to a "distant, almost imperialist government in Ottawa. In such circumstances, there appeared to be little use for a legislative Opposition party acting as an alternative government."

It would appear that the assumptions of the author would be slightly different at the present time. As far as opposition politics go, it was no ordinary year and it will be important therefore to discuss the situation in the Legislature during this past year to point to the ways in which the complacency with the present government portrayed by Gherson could have changed.

In the fall of 1981 the opposition in the Legislature took their share of the headlines. The opposition presented a motion accusing a cabinet minister of acting unethically. A Heritage Fund management letter leaked to Tom Sindlinger set off an opposition filabuster that delayed capital development appropriations of the Fund and provoked an all-night sitting when the government implemented a motion of closure. Memos leaked to Grant Notley on water diversion plans and Lougheed's involvement received considerable press as well. In the Spring Sittings, events pointed to the ailing oil industry in the province and oil workers rallied at the Legislature in the wake of rig shutdowns. The true psychological effect of the downturn came when the Alsands project officially folded and the outlook was grim considering the status of the Cold Lake and Alaska pipeline magaprojects. In the Legislature, the Brennan Inquiry, the Auditor General's examination of the Heritage Fund, and minor conflict of interest issues concerning a government M.L.A. provided some ammunition for the opposition but situations such as the Nurses' Strike, the municipal financing squeeze, and the C.B.C. payment of an $82,000 out-of-court settlement to Peter Lougheed were issues that caught public attention as well and could have affected voter perceptions of the government.

The government's vision of the public unrest and the public's vision of government in the time of unrest are both vague topics of discussion. There are however more tangible means of portraying the discontent and the flux. There was an increase in activity in

Alberta's political parties in the wake of the Olds-Didsbury by-election and this activity was no doubt encouraged by perceptions that public support for old parties was changing. This was a new challenge that all parties would respond to, not just the party in power.

Two polls conducted after the February 17th by-election support the possibility that Albertans were not allowing politics to be taken for granted. A non-scientific poll conducted by the C.B.C. and a scientific poll conducted for Alberta Report show 35% and 21% drops in support for the governing Tories. This is based on figures from the Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 1979 General Election held March 14 1979, which indicated that in the last election, the Progressive Conservatives held 57.4% of the popular vote, the Social Credit Party 19.9%, the N.D.P. 15.8%, and the Alberta Liberals 6.2%. According to the responses of the phone-in poll, the parties would receive the following percentages: [14]

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|---|---|
| W.C.C. | 46% |
| P.C.s | 23% |
| N.D.P. | 18% |
| Liberals | 8% |
| Social Credit | 3% |

The results of the poll conducted for Alberta Report are: [15]

| | |
|---|---|
| P.C.s | 36% |
| W.C.C. | 14% |
| N.D.P. | 12% |
| Liberals | 5% |
| Social Credit | 2% |
| Undecided | 31% |

Aside from regional differences that came through in the Alberta Report poll,[16] what was most interesting was the large percentage of undecided voters. This more than anything indicates the unpredictable situation in the aftermath of the by-election. As well, this explains why parties began to try to capture or recapture the imagination of voters. The discontent was aimed not only at the party in power. It seemed also to be a reaction against the old political alternatives. The discontent and unrest of early 1982 was therefore accompanied by a flux in Alberta politics as the results of a by-election and the results of an opinion poll alerted parties that they must respond to the latest developments. This paper will now attempt to look at the phemonenon of new political parties and the reaction of established political parties in this time of flux.

While a tradition of political opposition has never been established in this province, the general unrest represented a new challenge to the status quo. Opposition and fringe parties could gain a new credibility, depending on how deep and how permanent the dissatisfaction turned out to be. Perhaps this explains in part the arrival of two new "right-wing" parties on the Alberta political scene.

In this time of unrest the Western Canada Concept emerged as the populist party of protest. The W.C.C. formally entered the Alberta political scene when it attained registered party status last June.

It established itself when it succeeded in electing a member to the Legislature. The staying power of the W.C.C. has not yet been confirmed, however, and the ups and downs experienced by this party to date have led me to believe that the significance of the W.C.C. is to be found in its role in propelling the present discontent, and in focusing public attention on the role of politics in protest.

As a populist protest party, the W.C.C. has succeeded in capturing the imagination of many discontented Albertans.[17] Alberta Report pointed out that the riding won by the W.C.C. is "veined with gas pipelines, and is home to a considerable beef cattle industry. Participants in all these endeavours have been suffering economically for some time."[18] The outcome of a by-election demonstrated to many a rejection of both Conservatism and Social Credit.

> It was pre-eminently an expression of exasperation from those in the province who believe that govern- must be cut back, individual initiative encouraged, and the incursions of Ottawa upon the province stopped. All this, of course, had been the battle cry of the Conservatives. Now another party was raising it, and was getting elected instead of them in the process.[19]

The W.C.C. turned the fact that they were a new party to their advantage by contending that the present situation in the country called for a new approach. The W.C.C. takes aim at matters of federal jurisdiction and could be considered therefore as more a general "protest" party than a viable provincial alternative. The "alternative" offered to Albertans is based on right-wing

extremism.[20] The W.C.C. is seen by many as a collection of people enraged with the status quo but uncertain as to how they want to change it. Their statement that "policy for the W.C.C. will be an ever-changing one" seems to support this. Further, despite the party's phenomenal growth in the wake of the Olds-Didsbury by-election, the party almost daily offers evidence that it is on a course of self-destruction. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that:

> The Alberta separatist movement was fed by the effects of the recession and the end of the late-70s oil and gas boom. In economic terms, the W.C.C. resembles a number of previous political movements in Western North America where the collapse of a resource-oriented boom bred political discontent.[21]

Another political party that emerged in the past year is Tom Sindlinger's "Alberta Reform Movement". Until the party is officially registered and the founding convention is held the party will continue to have an aura of tentativeness. Nonetheless, it is interesting to study this party as part of the discontent. The "raison d'etre" of this party is the personal dissatsfaction of one M.L.A. with the present situation and the present approach to government, as well as this M.L.A.'s dissatisfaction with the separatist alternative.[22] Sindlinger is out to "reform governments to serve the people, particularily between elections."[23] He hopes to de-emphasize "caucus government" as well as the impact of "political ideology" when approaching problems and when setting policy. While the party will

promote private enterprise, Mr. Sindlinger does not believe in "right-wing" or "left-wing" labels. At the May 1 meeting in Calgary, Sindlinger harkened to the concern and frustration with present governments, mentioning that he was concerned that the public would have to go the extreme of considering separatism as an alternative. Sindlinger stated: "There is a lack of a suitable, viable, credible, reasonable, responsible, moderate alternative."[24] In light of this perceived "vacuum" in politics in Alberta, a vacuum that Peter Lougheed himself has referred to[25], Sindlinger has placed his party in a unique position: "We are an alternative to the separatists."[26]

The two new parties just discussed represent something of the discontent with present politics, as these two new "alternatives" are both found on the right side of the political spectrum, the side occupied by both the present party in power and the present official opposition party. The actions of Ray Speaker, then leader of the Social Credit Party, were typical of the new flux.[27] In mid-March, there were announcements of the possibility of a new successor to Social Credit. Then in April the executive of the Social Credit, Ray Speaker among them, decided that no candidates would be fielded in the next election. Ray Speaker appeared to be flirting with the W.C.C. as implied by letters sent to some supporters and remarks made in Press Releases and many were speculating that he would run for the leadership of that party. Support for the party seemed to be

crumbling as Walt Buck announced he would not run as a Social Credit candidate again and Fred Mandeville talked of retiring. The endless changes in the status of the party, the resignation of Rod Sykes in March, the folding and then rebirth of the party, as well as the actions of interim leader Ray Speaker served to undermine the credibility of the party as a political alternative for the future.

Perhaps more important to the present situation, however, the demise of the Social Credit Party points to the potential for political upheaval. Robert Clark resigned from the Legislature in November 1981, and when his seat was lost in the February by-election, the collapse of the Social Credit Party as a viable political force seemed inevitable. The implications of the collapse of Social Credit are significant as a sizeable number of votes are released. Polls conducted after the by-election suggest that the W.C.C. had picked up the support that the Social Credit had lost. It is unlikely that the resurrected party will achieve for itself a new and significant status, and therefore former Social Credit supporters may be looking for a new party despite the existence of the party. Perhaps more than any other party, the Social Credit was a victim of the unrest and discontent and the poll in Alberta Report confirmed the collapse of the party in the wake of Olds-Didsbury.

Another significant situation that the Alberta Report poll brings forth is the status of the N.D.P., which seems to have remained fairly

constant. The party has remained relatively aloof from the new party manoevres and the support for the N.D.P. seems to have remained rather stable. However the current economic turmoil has turned public attention to the political right, and the feasibility of left-wing parties in the mind of the voter may be affected. The N.D.P. is the one party that continues to present alternative plans to the province's electorate. The N.D.P. conducted public hearings on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund last fall, collecting hundreds of briefs from all across the province. The Alberta Development Fund is the N.D.P. alternative to the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. The N.D.P. has alternate plans as well for the oil industry, and recently developed a comprehensive "S.T.A.R.T." or "Short-Term Alberta Recovery Targets" proposal, which includes an eleven point program designed to deal with the present economic slowdown.

While the N.D.P. has viable alternatives, strong party organization, and a good leader, their success is not assured. The party did very well in the last election, particularly in Edmonton and in the North of the province where it was the party that ran second to the Tories. Nonetheless, one of Notley's own men admitted, "Primarily we are out of step with dominant ideology."[28] The N.D.P. must therefore be concerned about the recent discontent as the emphasis on right-wing politics in Alberta in the past year could serve to detract votes in the North that the party has been working for.

In this time of flux in Alberta, the reaction of political parties seem to take one of two paths: either they attempted to supply the public with a clear and credible alternative which sets out policy and leads the public in a certain direction, or they sought to capture the support of the public by giving them what they felt the public was demanding. While populist politics and "grass-roots" emphasis have been significant in the history of Alberta it would seem that, for political idealists at least, it is equally important to offer leadership and to be able to propel a certain ideology with complementary programs and platforms that are sound and rational.

With Alberta politics at present the situation could go either way, respecting traditional rules of politics, or setting out on a new course. It would seem that at the present time, with the emphasis on right-wing politics and the number of right-wing elements in politics, that the next election may be reduced to a choice between "varying degrees of right-wing". In such a case, the organization of a party, the ability of a party to present viable policies, and the effectiveness of its leader will determine its popular standing.

Many would suggest that in times such as these, circumstances call for strong personal convictions, strong principles, and strong leadership in politics. While the actions of opposition parties in Alberta during the past year will be important, the reaction of the party in power will be the crucial factor in measuring the actual effect of the

discontent. For the first time since Lougheed blazed into the Legislature in 1967, we are seeing the Tories on the defense. With the troubled economy governments as a whole are in a difficult position. While the present situation could cause political problems for Alberta's Progressive Conservatives, there is no doubt that we are seeing at present, and will continue to see in the coming months, the "Tory counter-attack"[29]. The nature of this counter-attack will now be examined.

> "If they believe we have done all we can and we are listening to them, our support will be as strong as ever....Hard economic times are convincing Albertans to look to Opposition parties for some relief. The downturn in the national economy is causing a high degree of uncertainty."[30]
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> "The government has to be very careful to listen and respond."[31]

The reaction of the Progressive Conservative Party and Government to the present situation will now be explored through an observational study of the Progressive Conservative Party's annual convention, a brief look at Premier Lougheed's perceptions of the situation, and a brief mention of significant actions taken by the party in the Legislature.

The theme of this year's convention was "Working Together". The ability of the P.C.s to accomodate, control, and contain the two thousand plus delegates in attendance explains something of the

success of the party. Without the effective party orgainzation, the "team spirit" would not be possible. To maintain this strength, policy criticism and new ideas are aired at forums such as conventions, under carefully controlled conditions. It was an interesting experience therefore to be able to attend the convention as an "outsider" and to observe first-hand the role of the Progressive Conservative convention as an integration device within the party, giving delegates an opportunity to present their concerns to Ministers and to the Resolutions Committee, as well as providing the leader with a platform through which he could dialogue with the party members.

I was able to attend the "Cabinet Ministers on the Firing Line" sessions, as well as the resolutions sessions and the Heritage Fund Workshop. Due to restraints of time and space, many of the convention sessions were held at the same time, but the mood at the sessions was quite constant. Delegates expressed their concern over the potentially dangerous issues that had come to the forefront within the past year. Key areas of concern and key problems were the focus of the convention sessions, rather than a statement of the party's previous successes, which is what I had expected.

In the sessions for Cabinet Ministers, delegates were asking for clarification, demanding answers, and perhaps most important, were conveying to the Ministers where they perceived the gaps to be. From my observations, the ministers that came under the most "attack" were

the Provincial Treasurer, the Ministers of Energy and Natural Resources, Hospitals and Medical Care, Advanced Education and Manpower, Environment, Public Lands and Wildlife, Social Services, Labour, Education, and Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs. These ministers were asked the most questions in their sessions, which indicated in a rather vague manner the areas of concern as the delegates saw them.

Perhaps a more concrete means of portraying the problem areas raised at the convention is by discussing the types of resolutions submitted by the delegates. As I was unable to attend the entire resolution session, I cannot indicate which resolutions were supported or defeated in all cases. However, the resolutions indicate the main areas of concern among delegates.

There were forty-nine first-choice resolutions presented. Seven of these referred to the need for a more effective communication of the objectives, initiatives, strategy, and benefits of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. One resolution that was defeated called for the support of the government policy of using Heritage Fund money low interest and long-term loans to other provinces. Other resolutions called for: incentives for the agriculture industry, a "conservative policy towards the growth of the civil service", highway improvement, comprehensive monitoring of the environment, incentives to the oil and gas industry, a review of the Alberta controlled

corporate income tax system, equity participation in megaprojects, extra-billing by doctors, water management policies, including a resolution against inter-basin water transfers, land use policies, increased farm fuel allowance, and aid to the housing industry. In some cases, support of present government policies was called for, in others, a review of present policies was requested, while some constituencies called for a revision of present legislation or asked that new initiatives be taken.

For the time that I observed the resolutions session, I was impressed by the debate which occurred. I was struck by the way in which there were very divergent views being expressed, as delegates from all the different regions faced each other with their individual concerns, orientations, and backgrounds. What I had expected to be a convention where the party extolled its virtues and successes turned out to be something very different. My overall impression was that the party was digging out its weak areas and resolving to attend to them. The Heritage Fund was seen as a potential liability to the government, especially since opposition parties had begun to talk of alternate ways to use it and could conceivably offer these alternatives in the next election. Concern was expressed as the delegates sensed that the party had not communicated its successes enough: constituents were flirting with other parties as it were, and for the first time, the government was truly on the defensive. The concern of delegates over the failure of the government to communicate the benefits of its

policies was the first sign that attention was being paid to the current public unrest. We had encountered the party stalwarts, as well as some of the disaffected Tories, and while there was a certain division in the group, I eventually came to realize that what was actually being represented was the groups on opposite fringes of this party of broad appeal and following. The ability to draw support from all of these factions is perhaps as a result of the managerial success of the P.C. party and the P.C. government. While some sessions were very lively, a sense of panic never erupted, another credit to the party organization and solidarity. This was important in shaping my overall impression of the convention. For at this time more than before, a position of responsive leadership and firm resolve had to be projected. The N.D.P. convention left me with the same impression of effective and responsive organization, perhaps an indication of the staying power of these two parties.

A key factor in controlling the fringes of the party is the influence of Peter Lougheed. The man at the helm of this party in power has been an important figure since the party's early history in 1965. Despite the diverse arguments put forth in various sessions as the delegates attempted to influence the conclusion of resolutions and sessions, the common bond of support for Peter Lougheed brought the convention to its united conclusion. In his speech to the delegates, Lougheed pointed to the new challenge for the party as being the economic challenge of the recession and of harmful federal policies.

The challenge was to "create a renewal of prosperity, a resurgence of opportunity for Alberta in the eighties." Lougheed emerged as an astute politician who was sensitive to issues and their immediate causes. The major announcement of the convention was the Government of Alberta's initiatives to adjust the economic downturn with some significant policies, among which was the Alberta Economic Resurgence Plan to be introduced in the months following. Details were not given except to say that the budget would be supplemented and that the programs would be introduced to help a number of key sectors. Some of the programs would be definitive, some contingent upon circumstances.

The focus of Lougheed's speech indicated a recognition of and reaction to the economic conditions and their effect on Albertans. In his speech Lougheed drew attention to some issues that the W.C.C. has been using to attack the government, but for the most part Lougheed was not meeting the challenge of the W.C.C. by considering them as a factor. Rather he was calling on the delegates to meet the challenge of the economic conditions that fed the discontent that the W.C.C. draws its support from. I learned from a party insider at a later date that during the closed session, Lougheed would not answer questions raised about the W.C.C. unless the delegate had referred to them specifically as "separatists". This no doubt is related to the Alberta Report observation that in dealing with this new political movement, Tory strategy will be to concentrate on the weak point of

platform: "What does the W.C.C. stand for? It wants to wreck the country."[32] On the whole, however, the convention did not dwell on other political parties. Rather, the focus was on that "two-way street", whereby Lougheed challenged his supporters to communicate to the constituents that which they had encountered at the convention, in the same way that he had used the input received over the year from them to respond to the necessary areas of concern.

The significance of this convention and the matters there discussed will only become evident as one follows the party's activities in the next year. As a political party, the Progressive Conservatives have already given indications that they will be working hard to "recapture" the imagination of Albertans. There has been a lot of press given to the recent activity in Tory nomination meetings, as the party looks ahead to the next election. Further, I understand that there will be a cabinet tour of the province this summer, and that Lougheed has encouraged his M.L.A.s to be visible in their constituencies this summer. As a government, the Progressive Conservatives are venturing on a time of responsive action. It recently became known that Baker Lovik Ltd. has drafted an opinion poll on the Heritage Fund, which will sound out public attitudes towards the Fund for the Tories, and should also indicate to them what must be sold to the public. Further, the Economic Resurgence Plan has already committed $5.4 billion to boost the oil and gas

industry, given a $47 million boost to farm fuel subsidies, and a $17 million break for the trucking industry has also been announced. As well, Lougheed announced the creation of a task force to trim frills from capital works projects, axing the $1.35 million art acquisition for the Legislature Grounds as the first step. Finally, the Provincial Treasurer announced during Estimates that they were suspending indefinitely their practice of using the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund to provide long-term low interest loans to other provinces.

The Progressive Conservative party as a party in power represents an effective organization that serves as an effective buffer zone between the myriad of ideas, needs, and desires of all those in society, and the formal governing of that society. The relationship between the mainstream of public expectation, political parties and the Legislative Assesmbly is a complicated one, and the borders and levels are not well-defined. A case can be made for the ongoing significance of party activity. During this past year when I served as a legislative intern, there was high-gear activity in all of Alberta's political parties, activity which extended well behond the bounds of the February 17th by-election. While many at first interpreted this activity as anticipation of an early general election, the major shakeups and conflicts in some of the old parties, and the establishment of two new political parties seemed to suggest that

the public's expectations were changing and that politics in general had entered a state of flux.

It was hard to determine whether the public's image of government was in fact changing. This paper has attempted to do this by examining and interpreting the nature and the manifestations of the relationship between party activity and general political mood. The opportunity that we had as interns to attend all the political party conventions held in the province this past year enabled us to observe the full spectrum of choices available to Albertans. The experiences at these conventions served to highlight the oftentimes subtle impact of the party system on the legislative functions of Alberta's parliament. Whereas the operation of the Assembly is based on centuries of tradition and precedent, there is no corresponding assurance of a continuous approach by political parties. This is perhaps ideal, as it allows the legislature through the political parties represented there to respond to the changing and emerging needs of its citizens.

Given the party system, by which all Canadian parliaments come into being, political party activity represents a crucial level of politics, that level which is at once an integral part of and yet completely removed from the more formal level occupied by the elected Assembly. After my experiences at the Legislature this past year, I am of the opinion that political parties serve either to reflect or propel the fundamental mainstream of current thought.

# FOOTNOTES

1. Edmonton Journal, April 28, 1982.

2. Russell Harrison, Chairman of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, as quoted by Neil Waugh, Edmonton Sun, June 10, 1982.

3. The first two statements are credited to Pierre E. Trudeau and the third to Bud Olson, Minister of State for Economic Development.

4. Financial Post, May 22, 1982. (Barry Critchley)

5. Edmonton Journal, June 5, 1982. (Ron Collister)

6. The following dialogue occurred between Allan Fotheringham and Peter Lougheed:
   FOTHERINGHAM: Does Pierre Trudeau understand Western Canada?
   LOUGHEED: No. No, he doesn't. And that's sad.
   FOTHERINGHAM: Is that the biggest problem?
   LOUGHEED: Yep. He doesn't understand us. He doesn't understand that what we really want to be is Canada....He thinks our motive is strictly to power. (as printed in the Medicine Hat News, April 22, 1982.)

7. Edmonton Sun, June 10, 1982. (Neil Waugh)

8. Financial Post, June 5, 1982. (William A. Wilson)

9. Edmonton Journal, May 6, 1982. (Don Braid)

10. Ibid.

11. Edmonton Journal, March 4, 1982.

12. "Lougheed Interview", in the Medicine Hat News, April 22, 1982.

13. Financial Post, October 10, 1981.

14. This phone-in poll conducted by the C.B.C. expressed the views of 1772 listeners. The results were published in the Edmonton Journal on March 5, 1982.

15. Alberta Report, March 8, 1982, p. 6.

16. The following figures indicate the regional differences in the poll that questioned 400 people on the way they would vote "if an Alberta election were called tomorrow".

| | Northern Alberta | Edmonton Area | Central Alberta | Calgary Area | Southern Alberta |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P.C.s | 32% | 38% | 31% | 46% | 33% |
| N.D.P. | 24% | 13% | 9% | 10% | 3% |
| W.C.C. | 16% | 9% | 16% | 13% | 17% |
| Liberal | 9% | 4% | 4% | 2% | 3% |
| Socred | 1% | 2% | 4% | 2% | 3% |
| Undecided | 18% | 34% | 36% | 25% | 41% |
| Number of Constituencies | 14 | 20 | 17 | 16 | 12 |
| Total Polled 400 | 79 | 103 | 67 | 86 | 65 |

as appeared in Alberta Report, March 8, 1982, p. 6.

17. In the April 26 issue of Alberta Report, there was mention made of the relationship between "Pink Slips and Politics", which indicated that areas with notable W.C.C. activity are also areas which seem to have suffered the worst effects of industry shutdown, places such as Lloydminster, Red Deer, Drayton Valley, Brooks, and Grand Prairie.

18. Alberta Report, February 8, 1982, p. 7.

19. Alberta Report, March 1, 1982, p. 8.

20. By right-wing extremism, I am referring to thinking that supports strong local government, "free enterprise", and rejects a strong strong central government, a high degree of government spending, rejects principles of the welfare state, collective bargaining, "full employment", and federal involvement in health and education.

21. Lethbridge Herald, April 6, 1982.

22. Tom Sindlinger, from notes taken at the May 1st meeting in Calgary.

23. Alberta Reform Movement Press Release, June 23, 1982.

24. Tom Sindlinger, from my notes on the May 1st meeting in Calgary.

25. In his interview with Fotheringham, Peter Lougheed expressed the following views on the political vacuum:

LOUGHEED: The Social Credit numbers just didn't go anywhere. I felt in '75 there was a reas vacuum in the province. I think I mentioned this to you once and that somebody was going to fill it...

FOTHERINGHAM: You felt that for how long?

LOUGHEED: Since the '75 election. Because you can't be in a position in a province like ours as a government where you're in centre stage. You are responding to the pressures of the N.D.P.--and meeting them--and you cannot leave yourself in a province like Alberta, with its history and its people, without a vacuum. (Medicine Hat News, April 22, 1982.)

26. Tom Sindlinger, from my notes on the May 1 meeting in Calgary.

27. Alberta Report, April 19, p. 6.

28. Calgary Herald, June 16, 1982.

29. Alberta Report, April 5, 1982.

30. Peter Lougheed, as quoted by the Edmonton Journal, March 4, 1982.

31. Lou Hyndman, as quoted by the Calgary Herald, April 27, 1982.

32. Alberta Report, March 1, 1982, p. 10.

# B I B L I O G R A P H Y

News articles and political columns
on Alberta politics
in the following magazines and newspapers
were used as source documents:

Alberta Report

Calgary Herald

Edmonton Journal

Edmonton Sun

Financial Post

Lethbridge Herald

Medicine Hat News